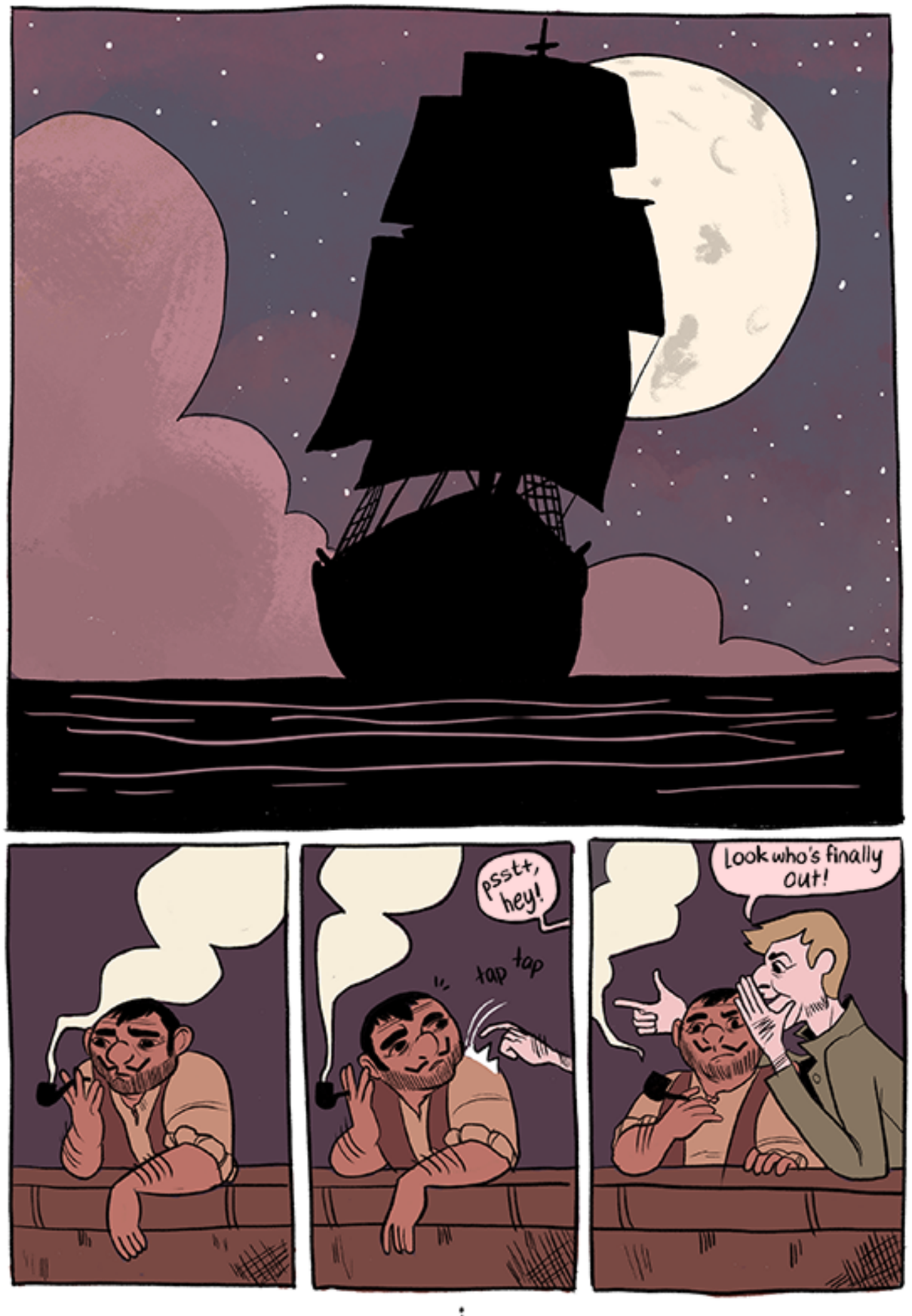
The Carpet Merchant of Konstantiniyya

Reimena Yee

Vol 1


psst, hey!
tap tap
Look who's finally out!

Jesus, he's lucky he's our guest –
–or he would have been thrown overboard long ago!
Heh... I'll call him.

HEY!
Hey you!

Come here!

I haven't seen you out today; yesterday too.
Yes fellows?
Ye, where do you go?

Urm, er, I–
I've a terrible condition.
That is...?

You see, I –

I'm sensitive to sunlight.
SENSITIVE TO SUNLIGHT ?????
snort
kee kee

HA
HA
HA
HA
First time hearing that in all my years at sea!

Don't laugh. It's very serious.
keeke
kee
Ok, ok. I won't.

But how do you avoid the sun?
Is that what the turban is for?
Poke

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Volume 1

A Fragment of A Turkish Tale

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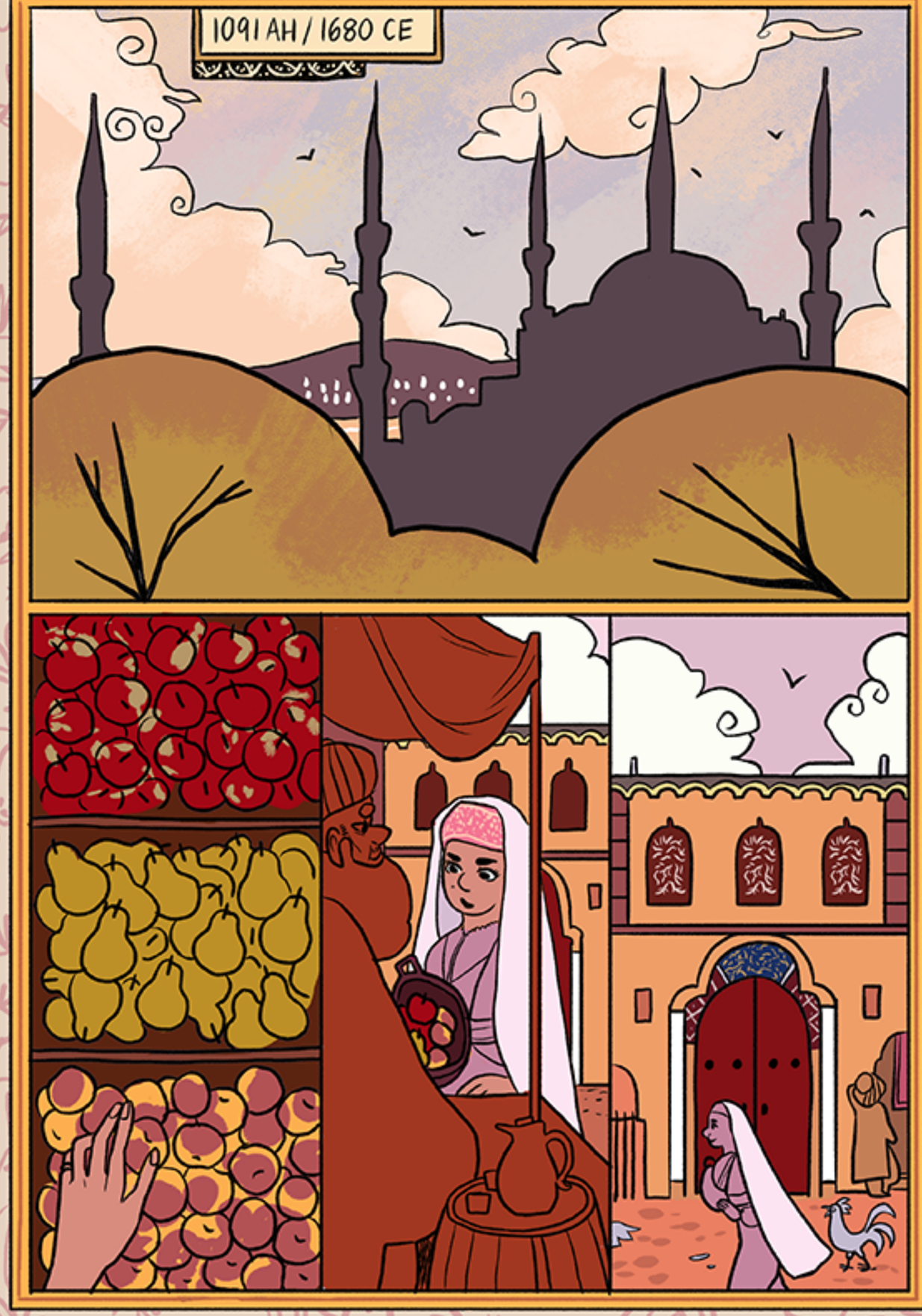
book one

the carpet merchant



Try this. It's one of the finest brews of jasmine in the world.

Yes! And it tastes even better!

It smells good~

I warn you; Ayşe has amassed a terrifying collection of carpets. Wonderful, strange, bedazzling. Who knows? You might want to buy them all. Will you be ready for this?

WELL, are you?

Behold; the Bidjar! The wool is so soft; it is like walking on Paradise!

Ohhh pretty!

Aha! But it is not THE prettiest!

Would you like to see more?

The Yazd! Admire the complexity of these colours. I rather like them.

The Kashan here will make a fine field of flowers for your yurt ~

And now, for one of the best, made in the region from which our business began –

– and of course, the Mugaddasi family's pride and joy —

This Ushak.

Amazing!

Ah, Zeynel çelebi* – you seduce me so, with your carpet sorcery. This is the second shop I visited, but I've made my choice –

I want that Ushak!

Excellent choice!

*çelebi = "sir"

but are you willing to part your purse for this piece of poetry?

GLUG GLUG

FIVE sheep!

Oh, but sheikh it is a work of art –

– don't you think it deserves a generous heart?

Fi Amanillah**, safe travels!

** may God protect you

Please come again!

Whew!

So...

... the sheikh likes you.

*darling

What did you sell this time?

One of your aunt's big carpets.

Yallah, habibi*, you oversold again??

Maaybee~ but look—

you got a smile on your face~

You may have your catalog, your weavers, your genius—

In fact, you're the true mastermind of this shop!

But your empire continues to thrive because I'm here, alhamdulillah!*

Admit it, you can't live without me ~

Silly boy!

YOU are the one who can't live without me!

OW OW

*praise God

!
BAAAA
Eish!! Just what were you trying to pull?
hahaha
What's wrong? Can't us old crows tease you anymore?

How's the masterpiece?

haha, don't be funny.

You know I'm good, but not that good.

Well, Ayşe and I expect much of you—

sigh

Zeynel, you may think me talented, but— — weaving isn't easy. It isn't up, down, shazam! A carpet!

It's not just wool I loom, but my hopes, my dreams, my life...

My life... that's what I worry about. I barely lived. I don't know much.

Do I've what it takes to tell a carpet's story?

Not even talking a carpet for the Sultan!

I'm nothing more than a mirage—

Bountiful at sight, but dry in reality.

And that's what scares me.

Well, Safiye, look at it this way—

Here you're given the best materials, the inspiration of the many carpets I buy and sell, Ayşe's mentorship, and the support of the entire workshop.

You wouldn't be here if we didn't see your potential, would you? And not just in carpet weaving!

Besides,

You'll never stop growing. Every day, every memory... they will become the threads you use to weave your story. But you can't rush it by worrying!

sighs Thanks. It's just, I can—

—never be sure of the future—

chew chew

NOOOOOO!!

25 years ago

Ayşe...

Habibti, they are already here.

What, already?

C'mon! Don't keep us all waiting!

Sooo I heard your son passed his recitation! A Hafiz now! You must be proud!

[nudge]

I am! But he refuses to be called a true Hafiz- not til he can recite all of the hadith too. Right Zeynel?

oh!

erm...

well...

It's...it's only right. There's no end in the pursuit of Truth.

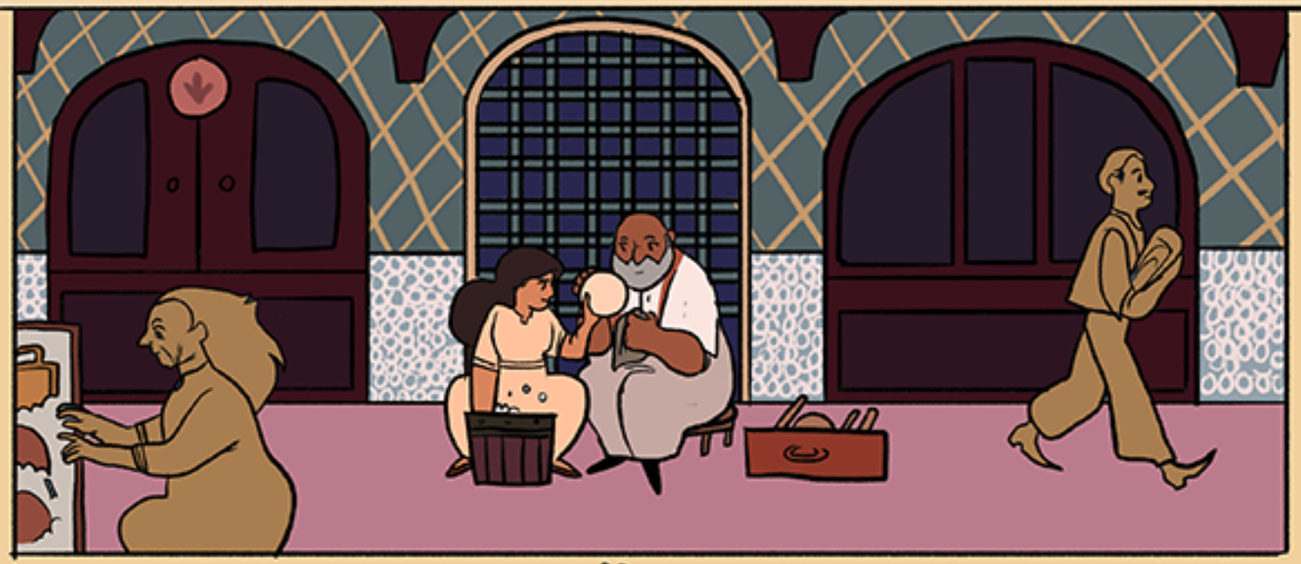
May I request a recitation? Any surah* will do.

O...ooh! O-ok. W-where is the Qiblah?**

Ah, thank you.

bismillāhi r-rahmāni

r-rahīmi



So, what do you think?

To be honest, he sounds—

Amazing?

Boring!

I mean, look at him—

He spent his WHOLE life studying!

sighs But the Cordobas are a scholar family, just like we're a carpet family. That's to be expected, right?

Besides

I don't think you need an ~*exciting*~ husband to help clean the house.

Yallah, baba!

I've no doubt at his household skills, but he needs to be someone more.

You know—

Someone who believes and supports what I do,

Someone who makes sense with my future.

Isn't that what we agreed on?

* chapter of the Quran

** direction towards Mecca

So, you want a carpet merchant, not a Hafiz?

Basically.

Give him a chance – they will be here a few more days.

Maybe you'll change your mind?

[cough]

Hi. The stars are pretty aren't th–

I-I know what they are doing.

What?
Well, we're the eldest and unmarried. What else is this meeting for?
So you're not interested at all?
No..no no. Not like that! It's just... I...
sorry, forget it.
What's the matter, Zeynel? How many times have you gone through this already?
This is my first, actually.
I furthered my studies to avoid the call, but here I am. haha
What about you?
It's been a couple of months.

Oh, but aren't you a bit too old to just start looking?
Haha. Very funny. I've got my reasons.
But I don't want to bore you.
No, no. Please tell me. I love listening to stories.
Suit yourself.
To start: Do you know what my family does, Zeynel?
Erm, yes? Your family makes the best carpets in Uşak.
Father wants to get one while we're here.

That's right. But here's the thing —

I've never liked weaving, even though all my relatives are masters of the craft. I simply can't do it, no matter how hard they tried to push me.

But I like what Baba does; he's a carpet merchant —

he gets to be out there,

he gets to talk

And most importantly...

He gets to see how people admire our carpets.

It's so good Zeynel

Once you get into it, you will never forget the joy of bringing beauty into a client's life.

I learnt everything I could.

It was definitely more fun than looming all day

Still, we've always lived in Uşak.

people came to us, but we never went to them.
(not that it's bad)

but I thought

it would be better if we move to the city...

Inshallah, we'll see more sales, more smiles, in more homes than we can manage in a small town.

I wanted to show the world my family, my world

Of course I told Baba about it. But he's old.

He doesn't want to move.

Besides, the family's happy here.

Can't blame them ....

– so it's up to me now.

Sounds hard. But you seem to have it together.

sigh

Yeah, I guess. I know the idea looks feasible ...

But to actually make it happen?

That's the hard part.

Anyway, that's why Baba suggested I marry now. So I can find a business partner.

It'll make the move to the city easier when the time comes, which isn't a bad idea ...

It's nice to know you're so sure of your life. I admire your drive.

ANYWAY what sort of clients do you normally get? I'm sure you've some funny —

OY!

What about you? what's your story?

Yaawhn oooh goodness I'm tired~

The stars are really hurting my eyes...

Don't they, Aziz?

Aw.

z

Thank you for our chat, Ayşe. It was nice to get to know you. Salaam.

Hmm...

Yaawnn

Good morning, ev—

Baba!

Pardon me.

What is going on, Baba? Isn't the whole family meant to be in town?

Why

Isn't he going?

He's tired from all that travelling. Even his siblings are too.

Anyway he won't get in the way of our business this morning.

Sure, but until then, I'll be with anne*.

Don't forget to call me when the client's here.

Yes, yes, princess. Promise.

* turkish for 'mother'

Is anything the matter?

No, it's just Ayşe being Ayşe. You will love her.

We all do.

haha Mashallah*.

Habibi, look outside.

?!

Oh, Yasmin. What brings you here?

I'm so sorry to bother you all right now...

But it's my mother. Her baby...

it's...

Mashallah!◊

It's today!

?

* phrase for joy and appreciation. He meant it politely.

◊ usage in another context.

Don't worry, sweetie.
We're coming to help!
I'm sorry, boy.
But I must follow them too.
Get Ayşe if you need help.
Ok?
Erm... ookay?? Good luck.
pull
flick it
pull
secure
half hitch x2
stretch
let it spin down on its own
whirl extra thread under/ over arm
repeat till done
wrap around stick for safe-keeping
remove
What is taking him so long?

?

The client's already here! Of course, he's forgotten to call me, again.

That old man, he's gon—

Oh, that is a sensible interpretation. I always thought...

!!!

It's alright. That surah actually has a huge philosophical context, 600 years of it! Usually the imam simplifies stuff for us, but the public no longer gets the nuance.

I see. Can we go through Surah al-Mujaadilah? I've a thought I'd like to clarify.

Sure, let me put this back first.

!!

help me

Excuse me a moment.

Ayşe! I'm so sorry b-but I had to distract her until I could get you somehow but she kept talking and I was s-

Shh! Why are panicking? You did pretty alright. Let me handle her now.

b-b-b-you sure??

YES I AM. Now, shoo!

Salaam.

Hanim Fatihah, it's an honour.

You must be the girl merchant.

I'm here, as the angels prophecised.

Would you like to get started? Baba and I prepared a catalogue earlier.

Here's a new design. Take a look at the texture.

Isn't it luxurious? Besides using our best wool, it's about 1500 knots per kerrab* – Thoughts?

*1.67inch

Ermm.... it is very pretty.

Hmm – I like the contrast between the blue and yellow. It... it reminds me... of the sun! Or a tulip garden under a clear blue sky. Oh, just imagine! A palace garden in your living area!

I can see that... I like the idea

Speaking of which, where would you like to put this carpet?

Oh it's not for me.

It's for my son. A wedding gift.

Mashallah! Congrats!

What does his wife like?

What does your son like?

He likes red, and I suppose strong deep colours in general.

She likes flowers, I think...

What kind of flower; any ideas?

I'm I'm not sure.

Oh! But she had these in her home. I forgot what they are called... But they have this shape.

Now, this: this should be the one.

Hyacinths.

I... I DO have something that fits just right.

da duh

da duh ~

That...
That went better than expected.

Is this your first time selling alone?

...err to be honest, yes?? Sort of??
Baba is still teaching me the works.

Good.
Because it's my first time too.
hah, I-I'm still shaking.
Are you ok?
You really knew your way around a conversation! I couldn't have sold her what she really wanted otherwise.
tuts No problem. I had fun-
probably the most I had in ages ...
?Z-
You know
NO NO you aren't pulling that trick on me again! Tell me, Zeynel, honestly, why are you so good at talking but when I ask about you, you bail?
poom
N-no-no you see...
sigh
It's easy when I let people talk about themselves, or anything else, really.
It's only a matter of keeping quiet and listening and following.
Easy.
but when it's time to talk about me?
I'm a wreck.

Why? There's nothing bad about you.
(I hope)
I-i-it's not that!
It's just—
I never thought I was interesting enough...
Really?
But you're accomplished, well-read—
You don't understand! That's what being a Cordoba is!
That's nothing!
I-I guess I owe you my story now, huh?
Yep...
I-I was pretty rude yesterday after all.
YEP...
sighs
W-well, ok. See—
From the day Allah put me on this world
I know academic greatness was expected of me
It's in the family's reputation
which not only puts the whole world in my head—
—but on my shoulders!
So I try and
try my best
I study so much and yet
I feel like
I learn nothing
Nothing! That's me. An empty jar.

I've a huge legacy to live up to –

my grand-father Yosef

royal cartographer and historian

my aunt Sofia

an alimah

my dear mother

the famed Dr. Zaynab

and my father the Wise

Professor Efraim

I've uncles and cousins and in-laws, working as rabbis and scholars –

and lecturers in universities and temples and

I can go on!

But me? What am I in comparison? Without that "Hafiz" title

Who am I?

I'm supposed to become an imam...

but is it really what I want? Or is it what my family expects of me?

I don't know!

I can talk all day about the prophets (peace be upon them), science, poetry, politics, anything!

But once the topic turns to me, as a person ... .

I don't even know my future, let alone my own self.

I can't shame my family. I can't show my wounds.

So what do I've to offer?

Nothing.

It's ok–

I promise I won't tell anyone.

Sob

[chokes]

It's okay. Whatever.
That's why... I would rather know about other people.
They live more interesting lives than I do.
It's so different.
Amazing.
Diverse.
sniff
This is the world the books never tell you about. This is where Islam lives. I want to listen to its stories and be within it.
I just wish-
I could see it more. I want to know more about people.
As it is, I only know academia.
Selling that carpet with you showed me a new world, where I ... am myself.
Zeynel.
Why don't you tell your baba about this?
Tell him??
Ayse, it's not so easy!
Why?
He- he knows how I fall apart. I can't be anything else different.
You'll be fine.
Ayşe,
The thing about being sheltered is that I only know what I know. Out there the world is .....
I don't know!
But it isn't going to be nice, or full of good people to entertain. I wouldn't know how to deal with the real world in the first place, let alone talk to people outside my sphere. He knows that, he doesn't be-

I'm so sorry I took so long! It was chaos an—

...

???

Where is Hanim Fatihah?

She just left.

From fright?

NO! We sold a carpet. She's picking it up next week.

"We"?

What carpet is it?

Cousin Sofia's red one.

Oh! That one is a jewel!

Bravo! Ayşe I know is brilliant.

But you? A Hafizi merchant!

You're too kind, sir.

But it's all Ayşe, and your family's artistry, of course.

haha precious children.

scratch scratch

Memo?*

Yes, sir?

*pet name

Have you studied today?

I would like you to read a hadith, then recite it to me tomorrow. You shouldn't slack simply because of our travels.

Yes, father.

Salaam Ulema.

GO! go! go!

Oh! Don't tease. Sit down, sit!

What's with the formality? I'm still the same old 'Raim you threw oranges at. here

Remember that?

I thought it was apples?

About today, your son...

Aah, mashallah. I'm pleased he was of help.

So am I. But Ayşe tells me... he clearly enjoyed the taste of the business.

Gave him a chance to... you know, open up, talk, be himself...

Mmm, yes Zeynel always had a penchant for talking... entertaining others, from young. That's why we made him a Hafiz. Best in class too.

Mashallah, he's a good boy.

But if he's interested in our work, it's good to explore it too.

With all due respect, have you considered... letting him try other things – on his own?

Huh

Zeynel has been blessed with plenty opportunity.

So far, he hasn't complained.

Just last month, he asserted to me his intention on becoming an imam...

That is, if that's really what he wants.

I can't tell him what to do. He's 16.

He should know.

Personally though-

I hope he continues studying.

I... I don't believe he is cut out for the merchant life.

He won't be able to cope, I know.

I see.

I get your point, Selim, but Inshallah, I hope he thinks like I do.

Yoohaoo~ room service.

Tea, brother?

haha, oh? Zahra, has the sky turned red?

You brought me love!

pfft

Yeah right!

It's not from me, dumbo! It's from your "habibti"

Now if you'll excuse me- You're not the only one Baba forced to study.

!

...I can figure it out later.

If you're done studying, come to the room at the end of the hallway. Turn left. I'd like you to join the family and find out more about what we do.

~Assalamulaikum-?

Waalaikum assalam

Come in!

Does your Islam forbid it?

What is this? Am I allowed here?

Wh—

No, but does yours?

NO! So get in!

Here's where we keep the secret for our carpet magic!

A single carpet isn't just its design, but its story. Not of one person, but of one family.

mhmm

—to bring it out to the world.

It's woven by the hands of my cousins and aunts, penning our tradition,

With wool, sheared and cleaned

Spindled and dyed, like ink.

Ready to be part of people and places

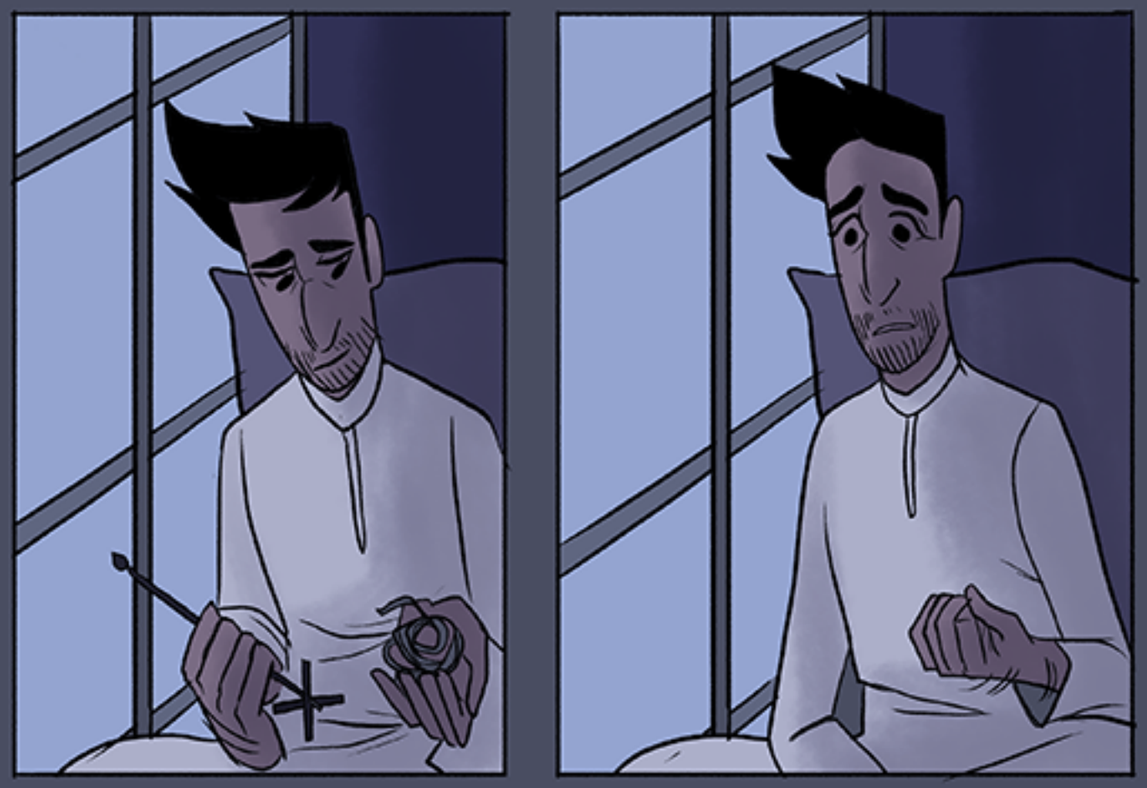
And that's my job —

We tell a rich story, Zeynel, and I think it's something you can appreciate.

ohh

Interested? You can start by helping me with this!

sigh



Forever brooding, aren't you?

Oh, please, Spare me! It's nothing. It's just...

Remember what I told you last week, when we sold that red carpet?

Yeah?

Y'know that feeling when you think that something—you never considered it before, never bat an eye at it—you wouldn't think it might work...

but it does?

That's carpets all the time for me.

Ayse, I really think this is...

I feel like I'm thinking for myself for the first time. It's strange.

But I like it.

That's good.

Anyway, Zeynel, my Baba talked to yours the other day. I told him.

Did you tell him... I??

No? I didn't tell my Baba about your anxiety... but I had to let yours know somehow...

Good, what did he say?

He didn't exactly reject the idea... but he'd rather you be an imam for your sake.

I understand. He spent years training me... I just wonder how I am going to convince him.

So you're serious about trying out as a merchant?

...I don't know.

"I don't know" sounds like a funny favourite to say for someone learned like you!

"Ah!.. Please - I -

C'mon Zeynel! Be like me! I know what I want. I do whatever I can. I get it.

It's not eeaasy.... Y'see.

The problem is... I - I actually don't mind following my family's wishes but I really think -

I want to try this

sigh

I-I've never felt so driven in my life until I came here... and saw... saw your world. I felt like I belonged... It's worth a shot.

A-and besides, it'll help you, right?

I'll do all I can to help you to Istanbul. It's the least I can do, to thank you.

Don't be so gratuitous!

I am serious!

!

I just need to get over myself...

Kick this stupid fear in the ass.

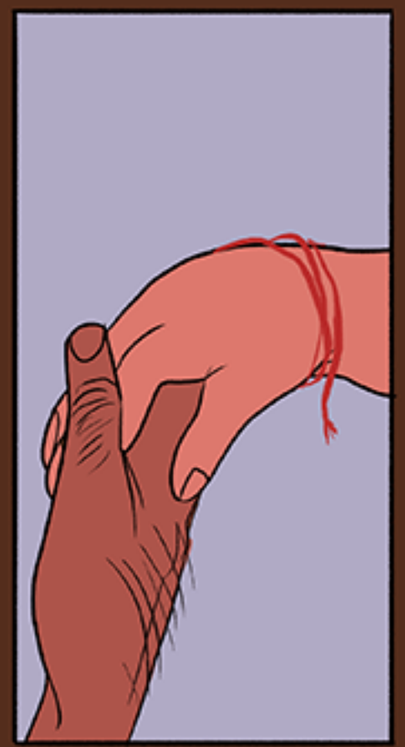
haha

You know, Zeyne! I thought I didn't like you. I had my doubts but now I think we could even be friends.

You think so?

Would you like me to repeat it?

haha, maybe.



Thank you.

It was a pleasure being your guests, Selim. You are a wonderful host.

It's nothing!

Just promise to help me when I'm ill, doctor.

Maybe I'll give you a 'friendly' discount.

A quarter, a half, a full-off ?

May I have a word with you?

Mother, father?

Privately?

Anything you've to say, son, you can say it here. What is it ?

O-oh-..

I.. I- I

breathes

huff!

I-I've been thinking about it... and I hope you understand

It's nothing bad!!

but I want to

after seeing what it's like

after thinking for so long

I want to try

being a carpet merchant.

Really, habibi?

Yes

Is this just a fleeting desire? I've my reservations...

Father

I really mean it. From my heart.

I thought being an imam was all I could be, but now I see there are other ways... to use my talent.

-I, I want to try. Is that ok? I'll be safe here. It'll only be awhile...

L-look, if it doesn't work out, there's no harm to it right?

You always encouraged me to study beyond what is expected...

I'm really interested in this; I desperately want to learn.

At the very least if I mess up, I'll know better — I'll become an imam then!

Also

Ayşe and I... have agreed on an engagement

Please?

You do not mind?

Are you really sure?

Yes!

I don't mind —

Do you?

very well then.

Your mother and I will let you stay until Eid—

BUT

sigh This is all very last minute. I don't like to do this, I'm sorry, but you're lucky Selim and I've history... We've agreed to put the engagement on reserve...

If it works out, Ayşe, with her approval, will allow you to be her husband.

If not, we'll take you back, and give her a better chance. I don't want to waste her time.

Agreed?

I understand

Memo?

I understand.

So it is

I hope you know what you're doing, boy.

oh, and.. Please don't slack on your studies.

You did it, baby! I'm so proud of you! Good luck- you~ Love

Thanks anne. I love you too.

Well, good job boy! Welcome to the family!

SMACK!

faints

oh dear

I'm trying so hard to make this work.

It's not - it isn't as easy as I thought.

Me too.

I'm sorry to have disappointed you, Ayşe

NO, no. It's my fault. I should have help—

Please, don't.

If I fail the test again... I won't mind if you choose someone else.

someone better that you deserve.

I can go back to be an imam. It's ok, I don't want to hold you back...

but you must— you've to let me go—

I'm surprised. I was wrong about you. Your potential belongs to this life. I suppose I must let you be. As promised.

ok?

Promise you'll return? Not forget your roots?

Of course Ba! I may be ambitious, but arrogant? No way!

If her success gets into her head, I'll force her to come home every Eid! You've my word.

Yeah, don't worry, Ba.

We'll be fine.

I never realised how much beauty and variety there are in Usak—

just imagine the rugs out there! All these families are making amazing art, practically unnoticed.

I have to help bring them to the city.

sigh

One day

One day

Ayşe, our income isn't moving.

So I... I'm going to the university in the morning...

and take up teaching.

haha! oh

I'm impressed! Are you a scholar Zeynel?

Well, I used to be, and yet still am.

Oh!

Now this is very interesting!

Tell me, Ayşe, what did you do to convince a career change in him?

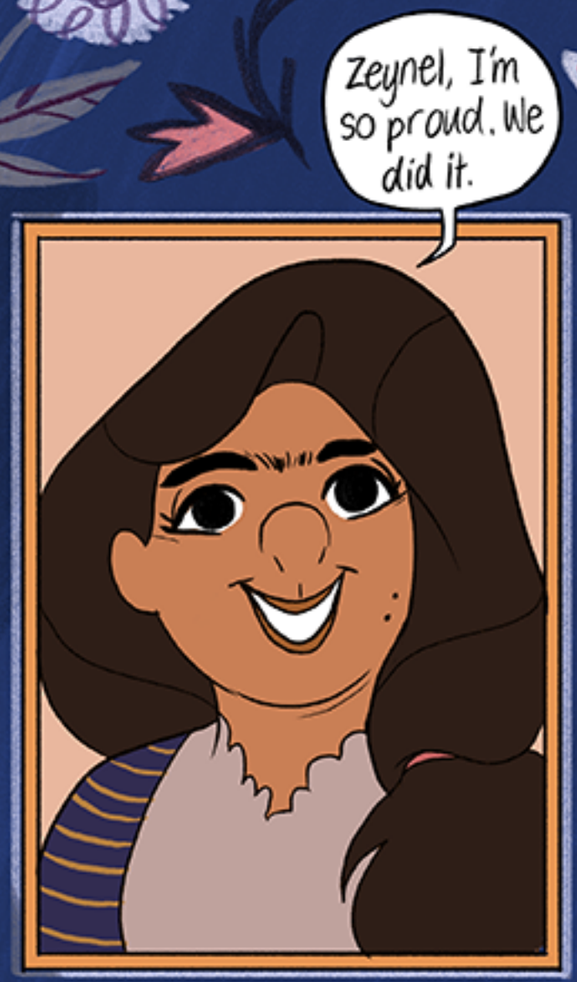
I may need your advice in the art of persuasion, to get rid of my political rivals.

Sure, I'll tell you how

but first, you must buy a carpet.

Hah! So you know how to do politics!

Sure, how much for the Uşhak?


Zeynel, I'm so proud. We did it.

Alhamdullilah. So am I. We made this work.

Is it me, Ayşe?

It has to be something wrong with me,

for the baby to have miscarried.

It's not your fault,

it's not anybody's.

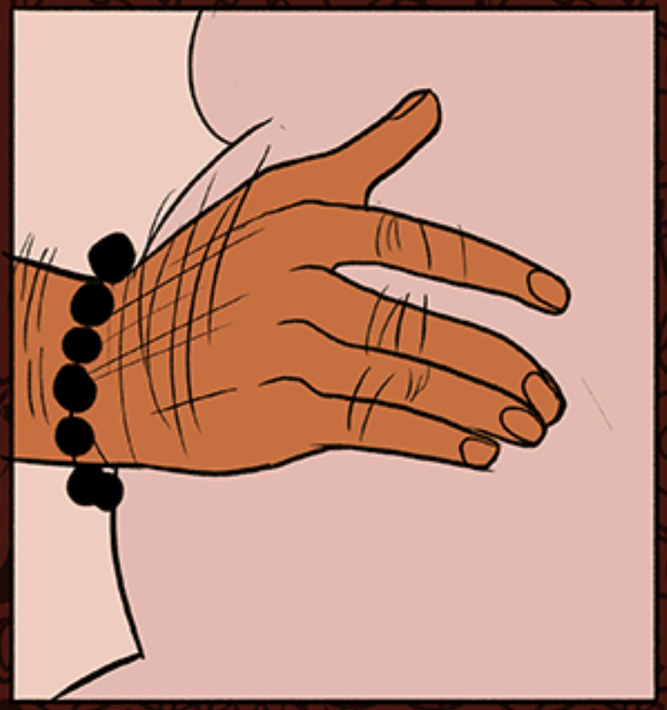
But... give me time, please? I just want my family.

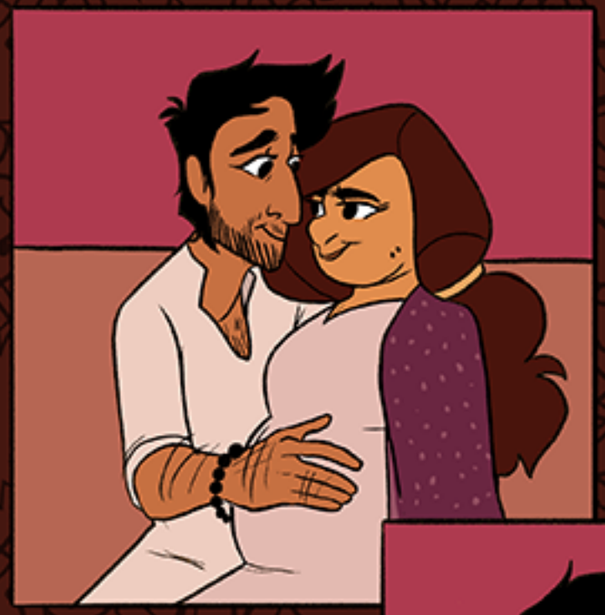
It'll only be a few months.

I'm ready to try again ...

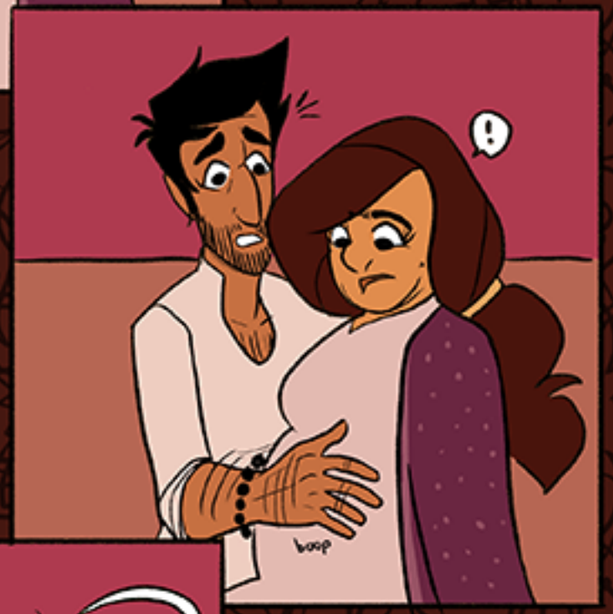
Take it slowly now.

I promise I won't hype it up this time.



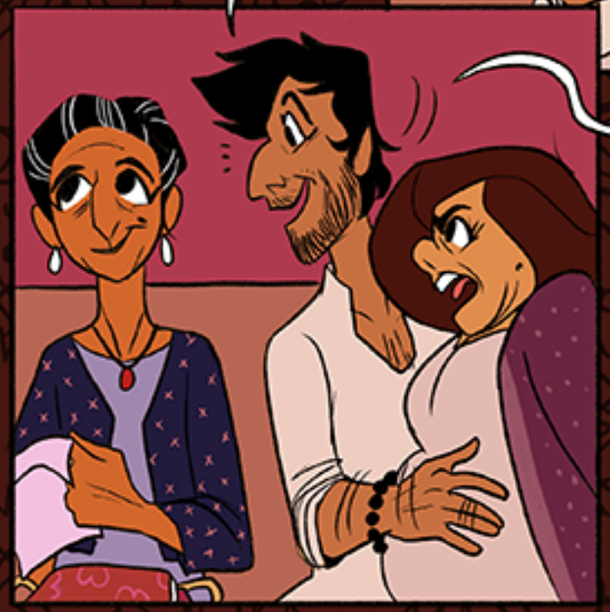


oh



OH!

It's kicking! I see it! I see it!!!



ANNE did you see it??

Zeynel!

no

no no no

There's no point hurting ourselves over this—

We don't have to do it again, if you wish.

Honestly, I'm getting burnt out too, hah *laughs*

Anyway,

We already have a 'child'. It's right here, look: it's our life, our hopes and dreams

And... and this... love we've for each other.

We made those together.

I love you.

. . .

I love you too.

Zeynel, habibi?

Yes, father. Anything?

I I just want you to know. *cough* I'm very proud of you.

You didn't become an imam like I wanted...

but you did what you felt was right for you... And you did it well.

That's all I needed for you.

Oh baba I... I

Speak up. I'm dying here.

I... I'm sorry if I ever blamed you for my character...

That's not your fault.

I think... I can handle it now.

You sure you want me to do this?

You know I'm happy with just you, regardless.

But we've to help her, Memo. Please

Safiye's trapped. Her family won't let her go unless she marries us.

It's her only chance to dream bigger, do better, outside of this dead end town.

I don't want her to fade away...

How many years have we known each other now?

20?

24?

Yallah, I feel old.

Really? I don't.

I lived such a rich life with you.

It felt like time was flying, yes,

but I'll always be forever 16.

hehe, you silly old sap!

The Carpet Merchant of Konstantiniyya